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UN System Model Policy on Flexible Work

Part I – General provisions

General Provisions

1. Flexible work (FW) entails voluntary adjustments to the normal working hours and/or locations, agreed between UN personnel¹ and their managers in accordance with the organizations' Staff Regulations and Rules and relevant internal policies. FW provides a foundation for work-life harmony and offers UN personnel the flexibility to effectively manage both their work and personal responsibilities. These arrangements support overall well-being, including the mental and physical health of UN personnel, as well as motivation, productivity and contribute to attraction and retention of talent.
2. FW may be applicable to all personnel, regardless of grade or level. Organizations should promote equal applicability across the workforce so that all personnel have fair and equitable access to a range of flexible work. Managers are expected to model and promote these arrangements, subject to exigencies of service.
3. FW is voluntary and initiated by UN personnel and must be distinguished from alternate working arrangements, which are decided upon by the organization.
4. FW is different from leave or time off, which are considered an absence from work. If personnel need to be excused from work, leave or time off (including compensatory time off) must be requested and approved.

¹ The term "personnel" shall include staff personnel (e.g. international and locally-recruited) and non-staff personnel with a direct contractual relationship with each organization (e.g. consultants, individual contractors, interns, UN Volunteers, etc.).

5. FW is also different from part-time work², which refers to an overall reduced number of hours worked, or the percentage of working hours on the basis of which the compensation (including salaries, benefits and allowances) would be determined as opposed to full-time employment. An individual on part-time work may also avail of FW. Work-related training and related activities are also not FW.
6. Managers should be encouraged to consider FW requests favourably, while duly considering the compatibility with the completion of functions and exigencies of service. Personnel do not need to provide reasons for their requests. Any decision (approval or denial) should be transparently communicated and, if denied, the reason should be clearly justified.
7. The use of FW is approved for a specific duration. This should be reviewed and discussed regularly, as part of ongoing communications between the managers and their team members. An arrangement may be suspended or discontinued by either the individual or their manager, should new organizational requirements for the position, personal circumstances, or failure to adhere to the arrangement, such as underperformance, necessitate such suspension or discontinuation. An appropriate notice period should be agreed upon by both parties for all such suspension or discontinuation.
8. A combination of one or more FW options may be authorized.
9. Accountability mechanisms should be put in place to promote transparency, fairness, equity and consistency within each organization and among organizations of the UN common system, when feasible, in the implementation of FW and part-time work. Organizations should regularly collect anonymized data, disaggregated by gender and other relevant dimensions, as determined by each organization's leadership, to monitor and evaluate the implementation of their internal policies on FW and on part-time work, if applicable.
10. Requests for FW and part-time work should be submitted and recorded in the organization's enterprise resource planning system, where feasible. This will help to track requests, approvals/denials and provide data on the use of FW and part-time work, as well as possible impacts on absenteeism, use of sick leave and retention of personnel. It may also allow organizations to gather lessons learned on the obstacles to full implementation of FW and part-time work.

Explanatory notes

FW has been incorporated into several common system initiatives including in the context of the [UN Secretary-General's System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity](#) and the [Enabling Environment Guidelines](#) and the [Field-Specific Enabling Environment Guidelines for the United Nations System](#). It is a powerful tool to promote work-life harmony for all and complement the mandates of the [United Nations System Mental Health and Well-Being Strategy](#) and the [United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy](#) amongst others. The COVID-19 pandemic made new ways of working possible for a variety of job roles.

² Differences between **part-time work** and **part time employment**: Organizations should be mindful of the distinction between part-time work and part-time employment. **Part-time work** applies to existing personnel who may require adjustments to their contractual status on a temporary or semi-permanent basis during the course of the career lifecycle, such as for child or elder care purposes, or when transitioning into a phased retirement programme. In contrast, **part-time employment** implies that the employee is recruited on that basis. This Model Policy solely encompasses part-time work, while acknowledging that part-time employment, as a contractual modality, may be addressed in other relevant documents. Part-time work is applicable to employees regardless of gender when available in the employing organization.

FW is intended for all personnel irrespective of status or background. FW is also intended to support all personnel across a range of situations without discrimination, stereotyping or biases.

While recognizing that not all roles or functions may be suitable for all types of flexible working arrangements, managers are encouraged to explore the range of FW to see what might be suitable for the specific job role, team, time period and context. Managers should be empowered to decentralize and expedite the processing of FW requests.

Organizations, in particular those with a field presence and specialized technical agencies, will need to consider functions that require on-site presence at the duty station and /or at the office and the overall operational environment, noting that certain roles and /or functions cannot be fulfilled easily if working outside of the premises and/or outside of the official duty station.

Organizations should give special consideration to situations of dual career couples. Managers of personnel whose spouse/partner is being reassigned shall give special consideration for teleworking from the duty station where the spouse/partner has been reassigned to.

Guiding Principles

Trust and accountability

11. FW is based on mutual trust, which is key to a successful professional relationship between managers and their team members. Managers should clearly communicate to personnel on their responsibilities and agreed deliverables including performance expectations and timelines.

Management by results

12. The work of all personnel, including those who avail of FW, must be planned and evaluated in accordance with the organization's internal policies on performance management, including results-based evaluation and provision of clear and timely feedback. The use of FW should not result in an increased workload for other personnel.

People-centered approach

13. FW is underpinned by the ethos and guiding principles of the [Senior Leadership Commitments](#) (SLCs), which were developed to guide organizations and their global workforces towards the future of work. The SLCs invite senior leaders to welcome new ways of viewing leadership by empowering teams and allowing for flexibility and innovation. These Commitments are grounded within the [Leadership Framework](#) and the people-centred approach that is also central to FW.
14. The implementation of a range of FW options shall put well-being and health (both mental and physical), and safety and security of personnel at the centre. Organizations should ensure the availability of the necessary tools, guidance and training to all UN personnel and in particular to managers, to allow an effective, inclusive and consistent application of this policy across the organization.

Resourcing and support

15. FW should normally not result in additional costs. However, active reallocation of resources may be required, for example for the provision of laptops or other equipment. Organizations may decide to cover certain costs and provide other relevant support to personnel.

Flexibility for field contexts

16. Field locations may face more challenges in being able to take advantage of some options of FW due to the expectations of physical presence by the host government, beneficiaries and external partners. FW should be adapted to respond to duty station-specific realities and needs, in accordance with the organization's applicable policies. FW can help to support physical and mental health of personnel serving in challenging work environments and mitigate the risks of burnout and absences.
17. Organizations with a field presence, particularly those in hardship duty stations, may consider operationalizing FW to meet their needs, for example by establishing hybrid teams consisting of personnel based within and outside the duty station on a rotational basis in accordance with the Organization's applicable policy, mindful of particular local contexts.

Gender parity, diversity and inclusion

18. FW helps organizations to attract, retain and motivate highly talented personnel that reflect the diversity of a global workforce. FW is part of institutional support for gender equality and helps break down barriers for employment, including among persons with disabilities. Organizations should both promote and implement FW with a view to diversifying their talent pools, and therefore contributing to gender parity, diversity and inclusion.

Ecological responsibility

19. Organizations must strive towards a lighter and greener environmental footprint and ensure that sustainability and earth-friendly measures are incorporated into all facets of their operations. This is also an important factor to take into account when considering the feasibility of FW.

Explanatory notes

Organizations are expected to move towards flexibility and a focus on the delivery of measurable results, and away from a "face-time / presenteeism" culture. Organizations may wish to augment existing guidance or develop new materials to support the management of virtual and hybrid teams. Managers are to be mindful that the right to disconnect should be respected regardless of the working arrangements in place, including for those teleworking from home or outside the duty station. Designated working hours may be agreed on, to ensure effective communication and coordination between managers and team members, if necessary.

Where feasible, organizations may cover certain costs associated with FW. Organizations may also provide other types of support such as guidance/assistance for setting up home ergonomic workstations, internet connections or other technological hardware. Additionally, organizations may leverage existing systems contracts to gain discounts for personnel who may need new office equipment. Looking towards the future of work it is important to consider long term teleworking and how the workplace might be set up to remain efficient and environmentally friendly and to generate potential savings.

Enabling and encouraging personnel to make green choices at their workplace and home offices represents a vital change that must be normalized as organizations take responsibility for championing environmental stewardship. For example, virtual web conferences reduce the need for face-to-face interactions and official travel, leading to reductions in carbon emissions.

Part II – Flexible Work options

Flexible working hours

20. Flexible, or staggered, working hours allow personnel to adjust the start and end times of their working days, provided that they work the required number of hours in any given day or week and are present during the common work week or core working hours established for their duty stations, if any. Subject to exigencies of service, the full extent of flexibility should be given to allow a personalized schedule in accordance with the organization's internal policies.

Compressed work schedule

21. A compressed work schedule allows personnel to redistribute the daily working hours in a given period to accrue time off. The working time that would normally have been spent during a period of one or two weeks is compressed into longer working days by redistributing the number of working hours per day. Normally, this redistribution of normal working hours allows personnel to have one day off or two days off, as applicable, per month. Variations on the number of hours and days off may be applied, subject to agreement between the personnel and their manager to accommodate specific circumstances in accordance with the organization's internal policies. Days accrued as a result of a compressed work schedule should not be carried forward, accumulated, or credited to annual leave or compensatory time off.
22. Organizations are invited to consider various options for compressed work schedules. In order to grant maximum flexibility, organizations could for instance consider an option whereby the working hours required for one month need to be completed within that same month.
23. A compressed work schedule may also be designed specifically for meeting the needs of locally recruited personnel in hardship duty stations. Organizations may consider a modality for instance that would consist of one week off that is not charged against annual leave to be granted after a continuous period of time worked on a compressed work schedule. Personnel availing of such compressed work schedules may have some of their allowances adjusted during periods of absence, for example danger pay.

Explanatory notes

A compressed work schedule is a way to mitigate the severity of hardship conditions and remote environments and could help achieve or maintain gender parity by allowing locally recruited personnel to spend more time off with their families. Locally-recruited personnel face specific challenges in hardship duty stations, including potential isolation from families and added stress and anxiety due to local conditions, as well as security issues.

Teleworking³ from the duty station

24. Teleworking within the duty station allows personnel to work at an alternative site at the official duty station. Teleworking may be authorized in units of half or full days and up to a maximum number of days per week in accordance with the organization's internal policies. Teleworking may be ad-hoc, agreed on for specific days, or authorized for a period of time.

Teleworking away from the duty station

25. Teleworking outside the official duty station allows personnel to work from an alternative location outside of their official duty station. It may be allowed for a limited period of time, in accordance with the organization's internal policies. When assessing the feasibility of teleworking outside of the duty station, host country regulations, where applicable, as well as the conditions of service applicable to the different categories of personnel need to be considered.
26. Personnel and managers should discuss the impact of time zone differences, if applicable, and other relevant aspects that may have an impact on personnel's performance and/or ability to collaborate efficiently with other team members and counterparts within or outside of the organization.
27. Personnel are responsible for any travel-related cost between the official duty station and the alternative location of their choice. Normally, personnel should also be responsible for making administrative arrangements (such as obtaining visas, office space, internet, phone, computer) unless provided by the organization in accordance with its internal policies. Organizations should inform personnel of the impact and possible required changes to medical evacuation options, medical insurance coverage, visa status, and privileges and immunities.
28. Personnel should be informed that teleworking away from the duty station may have an impact on their remuneration, benefits and allowances in accordance with the organization's internal policies. Organizations endeavour having a common approach and clear provisions on such impact in their internal policies in accordance with the UN common system's conditions of service, the purpose and intent of each benefit and allowance as defined by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and approved by the General Assembly and any other relevant decisions of their governing body.

Explanatory notes

The compensation package for internationally recruited personnel is based on the Noblemaire principle and the post adjustment component of their remuneration is associated with the cost of living at their official duty station. The compensation package for national staff is based on the Flemming principle, i.e. associated to best prevailing conditions of service at the official duty station. Accordingly, some benefits and allowances may need to be adjusted during periods of teleworking outside the duty station in accordance with the purpose and intent of such benefits and allowances as defined by the ICSC.

³ Although telecommuting, remote work, working from home, and telework are often used interchangeably, for the purpose of this document, the term 'telework' is used.

Organizations are to exercise flexibility in regard to requests to telecommute outside the duty stations, subject to exigencies of service, as there may be multiple reasons for which an individual may make such a request.

Organizations should endeavour developing a coherent approach to telework outside the duty station, with so as to promote equity, consistency and fairness in the treatment of personnel availing of this FW option among organizations of the UN common system.

Part III - Part-time work

29. Part-time work allows personnel to reduce their working hours to less than 100 per cent full-time work. Part-time work may be offered on 90%, 80%, 75%, 60% or 50% of the established full-time work, as agreed between personnel and their managers.
30. Personnel should be made aware that salary, benefits and allowances will be prorated according to the percentage of time worked, in accordance with the organization's internal policies.
31. Organizations should ascertain whether host country agreements may require full-time employment for visa purposes, as well as any other limitations in relation to the privileges and immunities and make this information available to their personnel. Organizations are encouraged to make efforts to overcome such barriers, including the possibility of seeking clarifications from national authorities if appropriate.
32. Upon request from personnel, part-time work would be considered taking into account operational requirements and exigencies of service. The contractual status of personnel in part-time work will not be affected. However, the conditions of service will be adjusted as provided above and in the organization's internal policies.

Part IV – Part-time work in specific situations

33. The job-sharing concept could be implemented through part-time work among two individuals in the same category, at the same level and in the same field of work who would share the responsibilities of one full-time post, with salaries, benefits and allowances prorated accordingly, when such arrangements are feasible and deemed appropriate within an office or programme. Organizations might wish to offer such modality to all personnel, where feasible and compatible with exigencies of service, in accordance with the organization's internal policies and with relevant decisions of their governing body.
34. Organizations may wish to consider including in relevant internal policies provisions for allowing a gradual return to work where appropriate, through the use of part-time work. Organizations may also offer to personnel to avail of part-time work to transition back to work for non-medical related issues, for instance in care-giving situations.
35. Organizations may also wish to consider including provisions that would support phased retirement by allowing personnel the option of having a period of part-time work prior to reaching the mandatory age of separation to ease their transition to retirement. Requests for phased retirement could be considered during the three years immediately preceding the date when the personnel would reach the mandatory age of separation.

Explanatory notes

Personnel have multi-faceted needs. Organizations are encouraged to broadly support new ways of working that are evenly applied and normalize FW and flexible employment such as part-time work and job-sharing. Organizations may be able to support work-life harmony by allowing a combination of part-time work with FW. This will provide Organizations the opportunity to reimagine working hours to fit more personalized schedules that will allow them to deliver on their mandates while securing optimal staffing and achieving operational flexibility.

Part-time work may support personnel for multiple reasons throughout the career lifecycle. The part-time modality should not limit career growth opportunities, but allow for a flexible, fulfilling and challenging career. Part-time work, where available, should be accessible without any discrimination, stereotyping or biases.

Phased retirement is intended to encourage experienced personnel to remain in service on a part-time basis to ensure the continuity of operations. It is also designed to facilitate the transfer of knowledge so that less experienced personnel are equipped through mentoring and training to undertake the same responsibilities as those preparing to retire.